



THE DIAMOND DIGEST

REPRESENTATIVE BEN DIAMOND

DISTRICT 68



Friends,

Thank you for the privilege of serving in the Florida House of Representatives.

I'd like to thank everyone who joined me and Senator Darryl Rouson at our town hall meeting last week. We had a very good discussion about issues facing our community and our state. It was helpful to hear from so many of you. Thank you all for your participation and comments.

We received several comments and questions regarding the proposals from the Florida Constitutional Revision Commission. The Florida Constitutional Revision Commission meets once every twenty years to propose amendments to our State Constitution. The Commission has the power to place amendments directly on the ballot this November. There is no review of their proposals by the Florida Supreme Court. The Commission recently concluded its work and proposed eight amendments for the November ballot.

Unfortunately, the Commission, led by many of Governor Scott's appointees, "logrolled" multiple issues into individual amendments. The result is that many of the amendments are confusing. In this newsletter, we have tried to briefly summarize each of the amendments, and also link to the Commission's website so you can study the actual text of each amendment that will appear on the ballot this November.

Please continue to keep me informed of your views, and let me know how I can be of service to you. My staff and I are available this summer to be of assistance. Thank you again for this honor to represent our community and to serve our great state.

Sincerely,

Ben

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THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION REVISION COMMISSION

Once every twenty years, the Florida Constitutional Revision Commission convenes to propose amendments to our State Constitution. The Commission is composed of thirty-seven members, including the Attorney General, fifteen appointees chosen by the Governor, nine appointees chosen by the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, nine appointees chosen by the President of the Florida Senate, and three appointees chosen by the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court.

After amendments have been approved by the Commission, they are added to the ballot where they must be approved by at least sixty percent of Florida's voters. The Commission is one of three mechanisms by which a proposed amendment to the State Constitution can be added to the ballot; the other two are via the passage of a joint resolution by the Florida Legislature, or a signature-driven petition.

While the Commission presents a great opportunity to improve our state's Constitution, I have concerns with how this most recent commission process was conducted. Unfortunately, many of the amendments mix multiple, disparate ideas together.

It is worth taking the time to read the actual text of each proposed amendment. Here are some brief summaries of the CRC proposals that will be included on the 2018 ballot.

- **Criminal Justice** (Proposal 6001)
 - Creates a crime victims' bill of rights, which aims to ensure that victims have the same rights under the Florida Constitution as individuals who have been accused or convicted of crimes. The amendment also increases the mandatory retirement age of judges from seventy to seventy-five and prohibits judges from deferring to agency decisions in certain cases.
- **Higher Education** (Proposal 6002)
 - Provides college scholarships to the surviving spouses and children of first responders who are killed in the line of duty. The amendment also requires a supermajority board vote to increase university fees and establishes the State College System as a constitutional entity.
- **Public Schools** (Proposal 6003)
 - Allows the Legislature to create a statewide entity to approve and govern charter schools. The amendment also prohibits school board members from serving for longer than eight consecutive years, and it directs the Legislature to promote civic literacy in public schools.
- **Environment** (Proposal 6004)
 - Prohibits oil and gas exploration in state waters and prohibits vaping in indoor workspaces.
- **General Government** (Proposal 6005)
 - Permanently moves the Legislative session to January in even numbered years. In addition, the amendment prohibits charter counties from eliminating or altering the positions of sheriff, tax collector, property appraiser, supervisor of elections or clerk of court. Finally, it creates the Office of Domestic Security and Counterterrorism under the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).
- **Obsolete Provisions** (Proposal 6006)
 - Deletes three provisions in the Florida Constitution related to property taxes, criminal statutes and high-speed rail.
- **Ethics Reform** (Proposal 6007)
 - Prohibits legislators, statewide elected officials, local government officials, agency heads, justices and judges from lobbying the bodies they served for a period of six years after leaving office. The amendment also specifies that public officials may not abuse their positions in order to obtain a disproportionate benefit for themselves, their families or their employers.
- **Greyhound Racing** (Proposal 6012)
 - Prohibits dog racing after 2020 and specifies that entities that voluntarily cease racing operations after December 31st, 2018 will not have their gaming licenses revoked.

LEGISLATION I AM WORKING ON

Local Gun Safety Reform

Over the past few years, the Florida Legislature has engaged in an aggressive effort to restrict the ability of local governments to address a variety of issues on the local level.

I disagree with many of these "preemption bills." I believe that city and county officials are often in the best position to address the needs in their community. As Thomas Jefferson said, "the government that is closest to the people governs best."

Since the tragic shooting in Parkland, we have had a lot of discussion about the horrific mass shootings in our schools. I will continue to advocate for a ban on assault weapons and effective, universal background checks. I also believe that we must let local governments work to find solutions to these problems. Currently, Florida law preempts local governments from enacting gun safety ordinances. I am opposed to this preemption, and believe it should be repealed. Florida is a very diverse state, and certain communities may not support the enactment of gun safety ordinances. But many communities do want to see appropriate gun safety ordinances in place. Cities and counties should be free to debate these issues and take steps to best protect their children and residents. I am working this summer on legislation to repeal this preemption in Florida law, so that our cities and counties have the ability to be proactive in enacting gun safety ordinances. I hope you will continue to share your views with me on this issue.

Civic Education

I am very interested in how we can encourage more civic engagement by Floridians. Our democracy only works when citizens are engaged. Florida currently ranks 49th in the country for the number of people who vote in local elections. We are 50th for the number of people who have attended a public meeting, and 48th for the number of people who belong to a service or civic group. I know we have a lot of work to do to improve our civic engagement - and we can make a lot of progress by improving civics education in our schools. I would like to hear your thoughts. What can we do to promote better civic engagement in Florida? How do we encourage more Floridians to participate in our community and civic work - to attend public meetings, to vote in elections, to organize on issues in their neighborhoods? I am working on legislative ideas this summer relating to civic education and engagement. I hope to hear your thoughts and ideas.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



I was honored to read the names of Holocaust victims as part of the Florida Holocaust Museum's annual Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration.

Thank you to the Florida Chamber of Commerce for recognizing me as a Distinguished Advocate for the 2018 legislative session. As a small business owner, I know how important it is for Florida to be a state where our entrepreneurs and businesses can thrive.



I recently participated in the Suncoast Tiger Bay's annual Legislative Wrap-up where I shared my thoughts regarding the 2018 Session and answered questions from the audience. Thanks to Tiger Bay for the fun and engaging conversation.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Thank you to the members of the St. Petersburg City Council for the opportunity to speak with them at their recent Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations (LAIR) Committee meeting.



The University of South Florida St. Petersburg and St. Petersburg College invited members of the Pinellas County Legislative Delegation to announce additional scholarship opportunities and an expansion of the FUSE program, which allows students to transfer to USFSP after completing two years at SPC. I am glad to see the Legislature investing more money in these types of programs, to ensure that all students have access to a great education here in Pinellas County.